URBANISTICA DI GENERE
costruire luoghi più giusti

3 aprile 2025
Tempi e spazi delle città: la convivenza tra i bisogni delle diverse generazioni

Introduzione
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agenda urbana BRESCIA 2050

URBAN CENTER BRESCIA LABORATORIO DI CULTURA URBANA

COMMISSIONE PARI OPPORTUNITÀ COMUNE DI BRESCIA

ORDINE DEGLI INGEGNERI DELLA PROVINCIA DI BRESCIA

OAPPC ORDINE ARCHITETTI PIANIFICATORI PAESAGGISTI CONSERVATORI BRESCIA

AIDIA ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA DONNE INGEGNERI E ARCHITETTI

presso Urban Center Brescia (Via San Faustino 33b)

Urban Minded

How can the design of urban spaces contribute
to the mental health and well-being of teenage girls?

03.04.2025

Henning Larsen — SDU STATENS INSTITUT FOR FOLKESUNDHED — RAMBØLL FONDEN
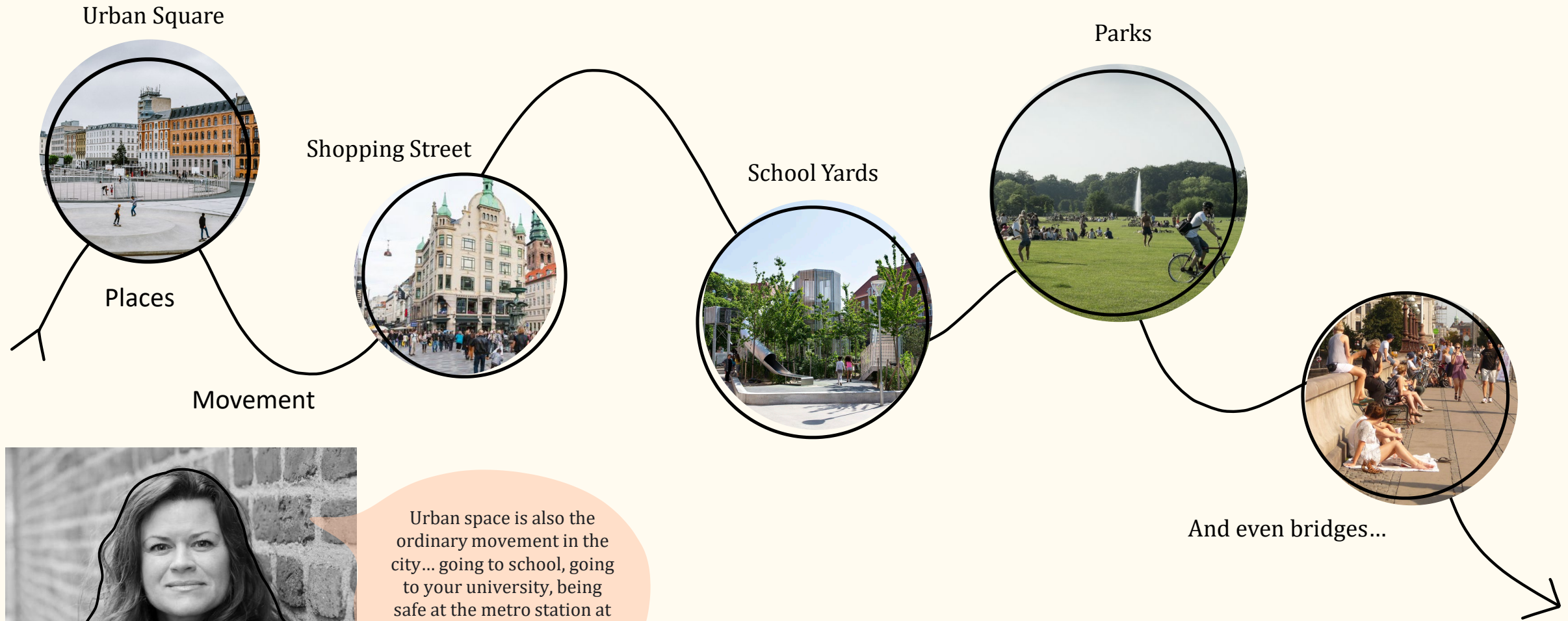
Peter Hansen, Legende børn. Enghave Plads, 1907-08, SMK
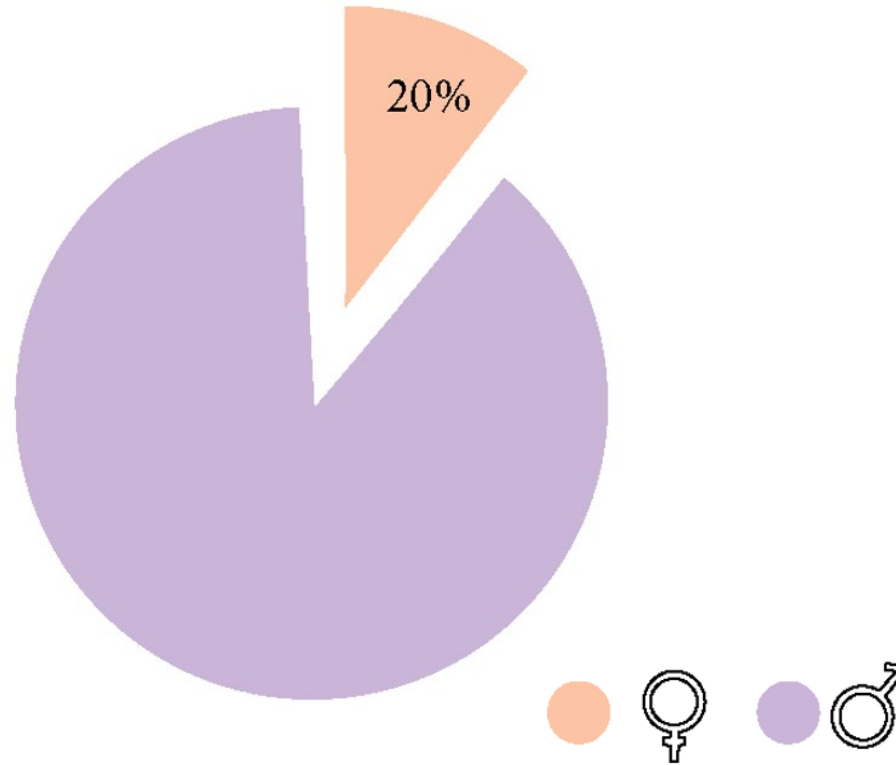
Why teenage girls?
Why mental health and well-being?

What is an urban space?

Urban Square

Places

Shopping Street

Movement

Parks

School Yards

And even bridges...

Urban space is also the ordinary movement in the city... going to school, going to your university, being safe at the metro station at night... these are all part of experiencing urban spaces.

Camilla Van Deurs
City Architect, Copenhagen

# 1. Girls and young women in urban spaces

20%

A study from Sweden (2012) indicated
that only 20% of teenage girls and women use outdoor areas for
spontaneous sport activities, compared to 80% of boys and men.

Blomdahl, U., Elofsson, S. & Åkesson, M. (2012): Spontanidrott för vilka? En studie av kön och nyttjande av planlagda utomhusytor för spontanidrott under sommarhalvåret. IDROTTSFÖRVALTNINGEN, Stockholm Universitet

1. Girls and young women in urban spaces
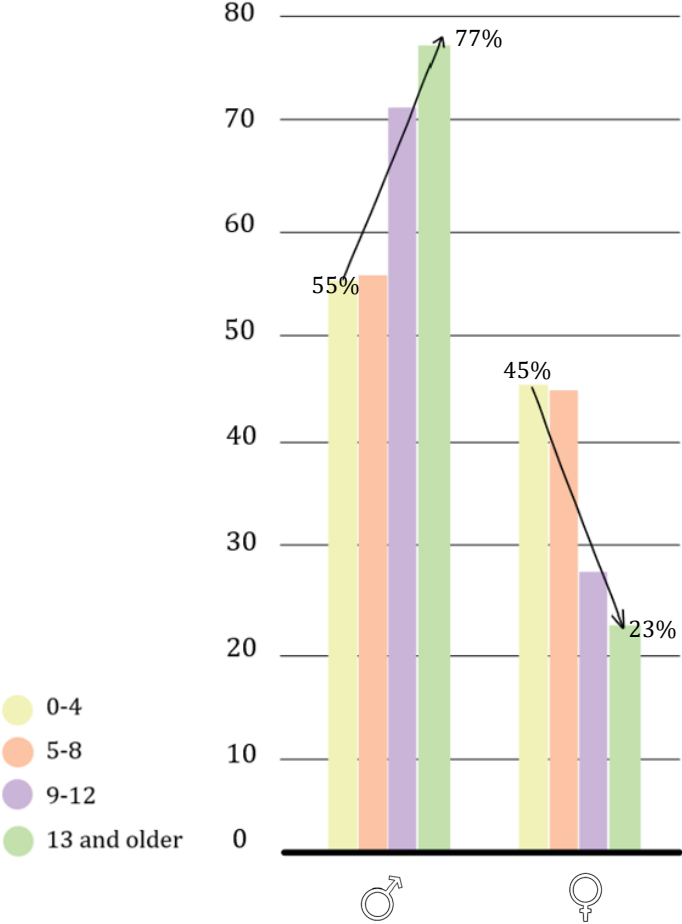
Who plays outside according to gender and age
(in percentages), based on observations made
in twenty different municipalities in the Netherlands.
https://urbanspringtime.blogspot.com/2021/12/playing-outside-who-where-and-what.html

2. Narratives and norms

We shouldn't paint a picture of the girls as a homogeneous group that just wants to sit and chitchat.

Laura Bendix Pedersen
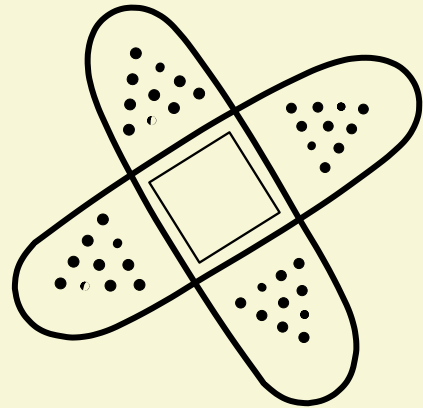Innovation Officer, GAME

The norms say the girls should be passive, adorable, care about their appearance, and not be so loud. The narrative about boys is that they should be physically strong, but also mentally. They should be slightly rough, not so good at taking care of themselves and do not show emotions. When urban spaces reproduce these narratives, the norms become even stronger, and it becomes more difficult to diverge from them.

Cecilie Nørgaard
Director at Mangfold , Education and Gender Sociologist

3. Girls and mental health

Stress Levels
% with high score on stress levels

Mental Health
% with low score on the mental health scale

Physical Health
% with low score on the physical health scale

2010   2013   2017   2021

3. Girls and mental health

Pathogenic

Salutogenic

VS.

4. Inbetween-ness

...stop playing outside

...start using the city
without adults

...gain access
and freedom

...stop participating
in organized sports

....step into a
new social life

...start getting used
to their new body

...become aware of
the gaze of others

....internalize societal
expectations

11 years old   14-16 years old   18 years old

4. Inbetween-ness

When you're a kid you're just following your parents but when you grow up, you get to know the city more and explore it for yourself. You get to find hidden things and secret places.

I feel like this is just an awkward age where you're not an adult but you're not a kid either. It feels like you're expected to act more mature but you also can't act too mature... If I were to go on those swings, there would be no one around my age. It's like I'm too old for them. But if I were to smoke over on the side, people would think I'm too young for that.

It's just awkward that way.
Sometimes I want to be older but I feel like that also comes with way more responsibility. Other times I just want to be a kid again, and have my problems solve themselves with a hug from my mom.

Research Design & Methodology

A multidisciplinary approach

Fieldwork
applying qualitative
methods to engage the
user group
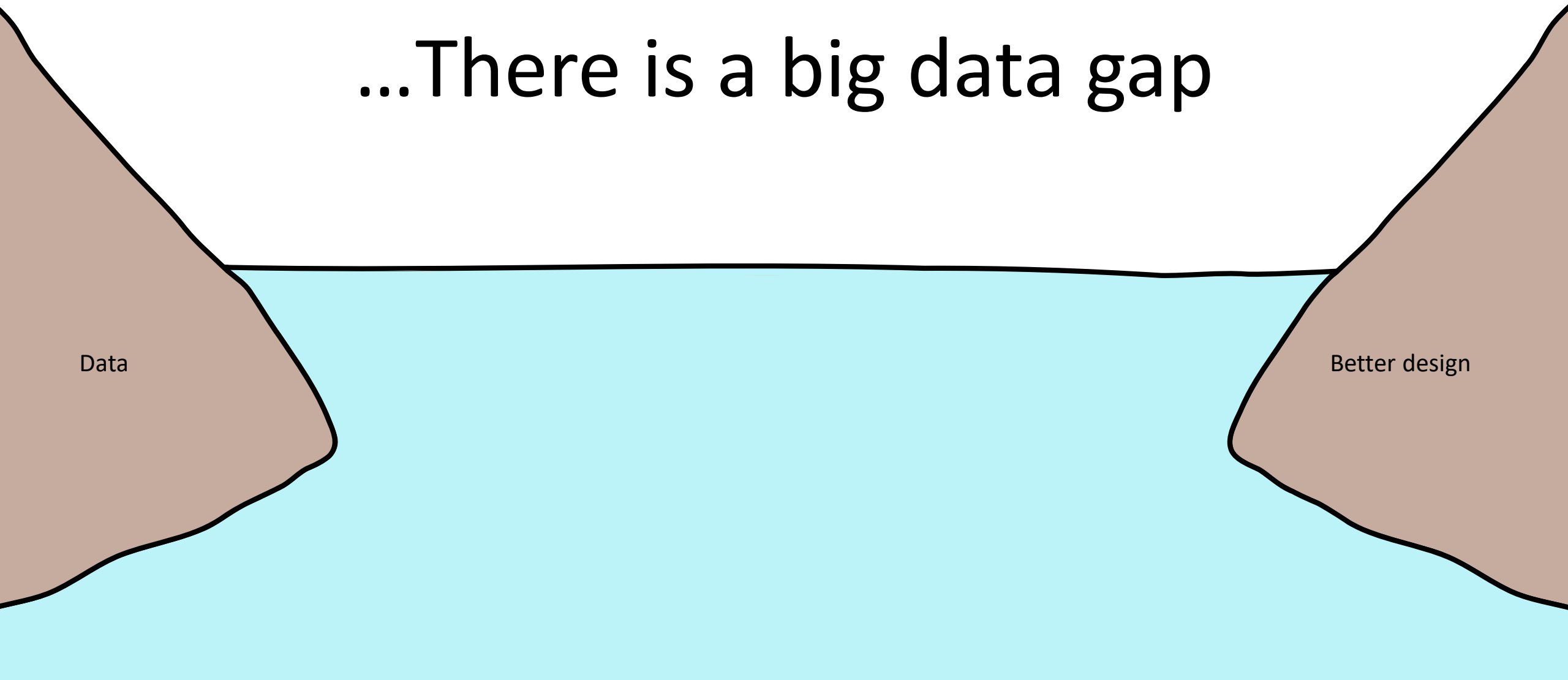
Expert group
Interviews &
feedback

Literature
review of academic
research on gender, youth,
and public space
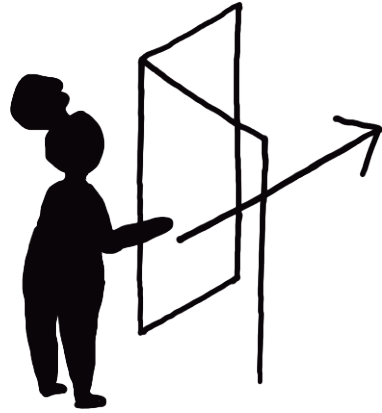
…There is a big data gap

Literature Review

Urban Green Spaces

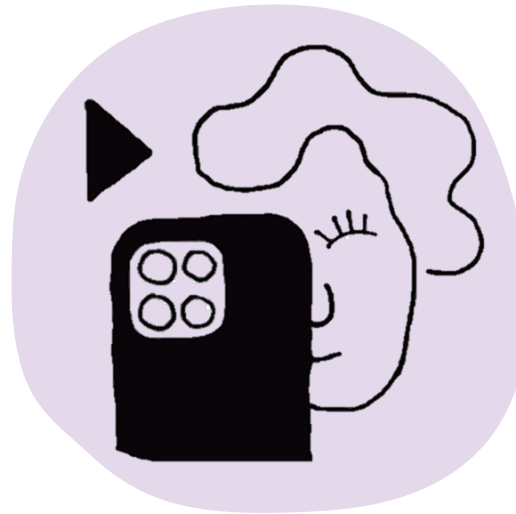Safety and Accessibility

Physical Activity

Social Development

Qualitative methods of data collection

Walk-and-talk interviews

Video Diaries

Workshops

The significance of a lived experience

Bridge the gap where information is lacking.
Lived experiences can act as a bridge between siloed knowledge, providing intersectional insight. They tell us what matters to people.

Understand the reasons for a pattern, not only the pattern.
Gathering lived experiences allows us to investigate the depths of a pattern. Go beyond numbers data.

Deepen our understanding of generic terms.
Certain values often mean different things to different people. Lived experiences can help us understand how these are perceived, made sense of, acted upon, sought out, and more.

Break down the stereotypes.
Collecting lived experience from different members of a user group diversifies the image of the members that on first glance might seem homogeneous.

Empower the user group.
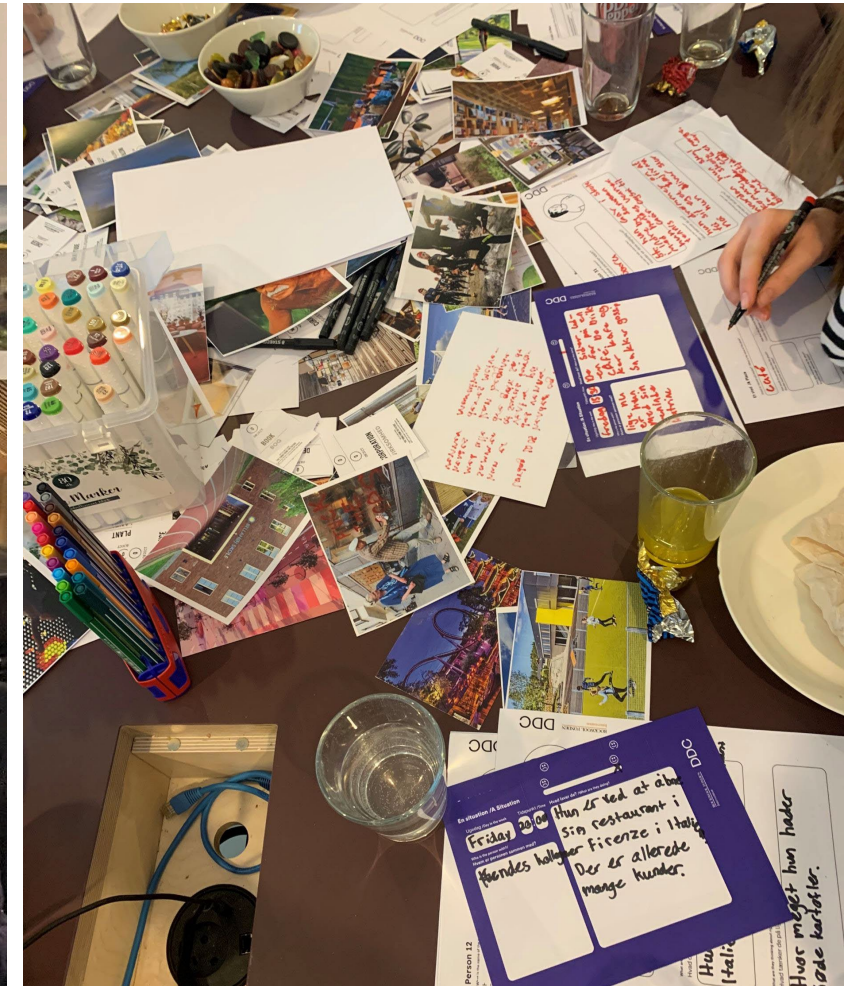Qualitative research puts people's experiences on center stage, making it known that their perspectives matter.

So what did the girls say?

Designing with the users

Reoccuring themes

Sense of safety

Adult's assumptions about their lives

Enthusiasm about the project

Sensory experiences

Being controlled

Spatial awareness

Inbetween-ness

Leisure

A sense of identity

Relations to places, relations to others

Urban art

Being in controlled

Curiosity and exploration

Being active / being passive active passiveness

Money

Hanging out

Mobility and access

Scale

Age barriers (in both directions)

Play, curiosity and exploration

"There doesn't have to be an activity. We can come up with a game ourselves. Everything is possible. For example, there doesn't have to be a basketball court or anything like that..."

"My friends and I sometimes just go for walks... long walks to such random places. These are often places that most of us may not be familiar with. And then we just talk."

"We always find small streets to walk down where there are fewer cars. And then you find these little places that you would never have thought existed. It's fun and it's always exciting to find new places. And I can feel how the city is becoming more and more familiar to me. But also more personal."

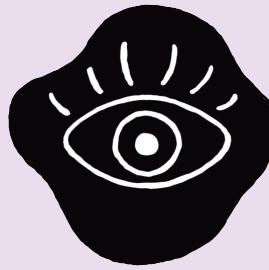# A theoretical framework for approaching mental health

Sense of Safety
Condition of feeling secure, feeling that one is not in harm's way or in danger of physical/emotional hurt, injury, loss, etc.

Stimulation
Sensory input affecting one's thinking or feeling processes can generate excitement, interest, discomfort, etc.

Visibility & Recognition
Seeing and being seen, understanding and being understood, recognizing and being recognized.

Levels of Privacy
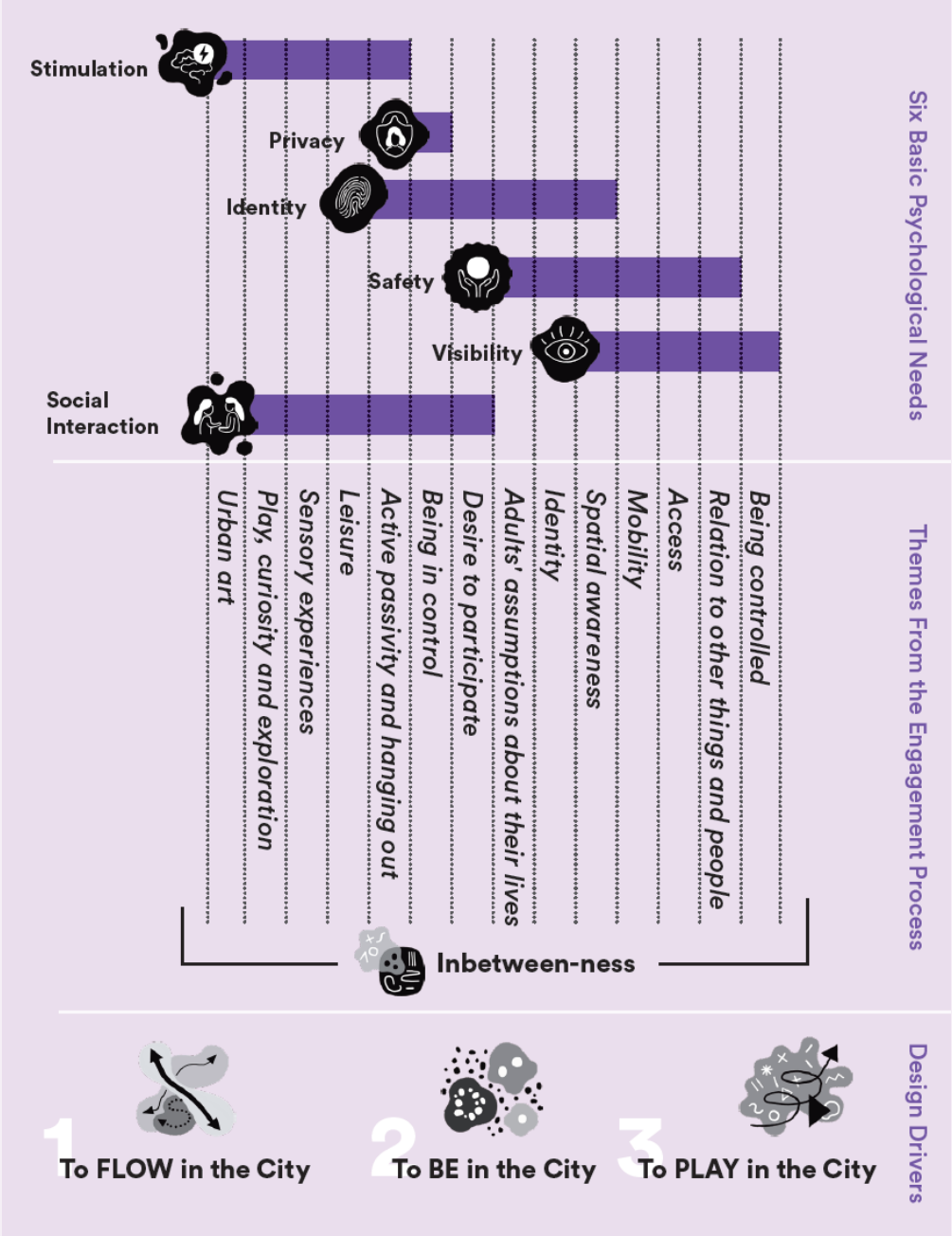Varying states of being apart from the company or gaze of others.

Social Interaction
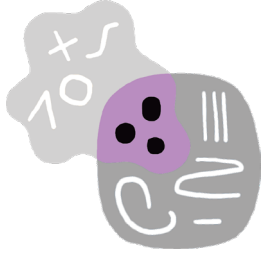Processes of reciprocal influence of individuals over one another during social encounter.

Sense of Identity
Perception of the collection of characteristics that define a person or place.

Analysis at a glance

Design drivers

Inbetween-ness provides an over-arching theme, enveloping the complexity of the findings and acting as a consistent thread throughout the project.

1. To FLOW in the city

3. To PLAY in the city

2. To BE in the city

To FLOW in the city

I don't really stop and sit too much. There's just so much movement in the street and I like being a part of it instead of just watching it!

You can just explore things, you'll always find something new and some nice small streets. It's nice because it means that you're not seeing the same boring things all the time!
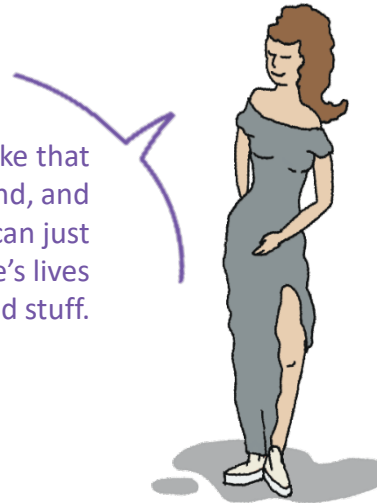
Which psychological relate to FLOW?

Safety

Stimulation

Sense of Identity

To BE in the city

There needs to be room for us in the city! That's really important that we can always find at least one space that's right for us.

I definitely like city vibes. I like that there are so many people around, and buildings everywhere and you can just see small glimpses of people's lives and stuff.

Which psychological relate to BE?

Safety

Levels of Privacy

Identity

Social interactions

To PLAY in the city

But sometimes it just feels like things are for younger kids, like there's an age restriction of something.

I love it when I get a chance to be silly and joke around. It makes me feel like a child again! I think a lot of people really miss that feeling... and not just people my age, also adults. We don't have to be responsible and mature all the time.

We always find something to do. There doesn't need to be a basketball hoop or something like that, we just come up with the games ourselves.

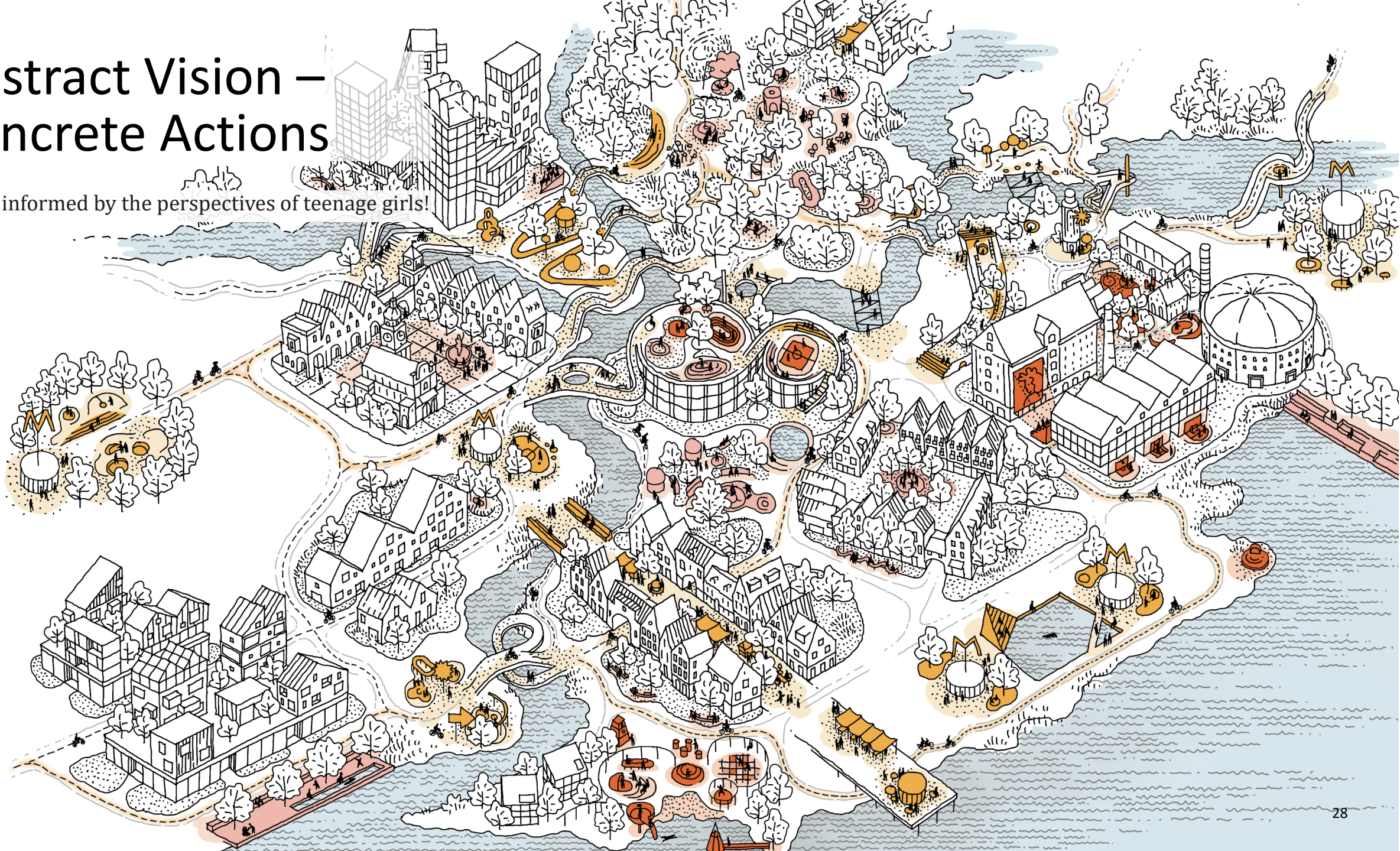## Which psychological relate to PLAY?

Visibility

Stimulation

Identity

Social Interactions

Abstract Vision – Concrete Actions

A city informed by the perspectives of teenage girls!

PLACES
TO PLAY

Invitation to nature

Integrate simple & natural materials to create spaces to hang out in the park. The more grass and wooden surface, the better!

Playful Interface With Water

Provide flexible urban elements along waterfronts or rivers, whether fishing spots, viewpoints, jumping & swimming areas..

Scale-Up

Adjusted heights & shapes allow teens to use playful elements simply by being better suited to their bodies.

Soundbox

Open & free spaces allow users to be as loud as they want, whether playing with a band, singing with your friends, or screaming to release frustration.

Hide & Play

Sometimes to allow yourself to play, be active, creative, & fully express yourself, you need to be hidden from the eyes of others...
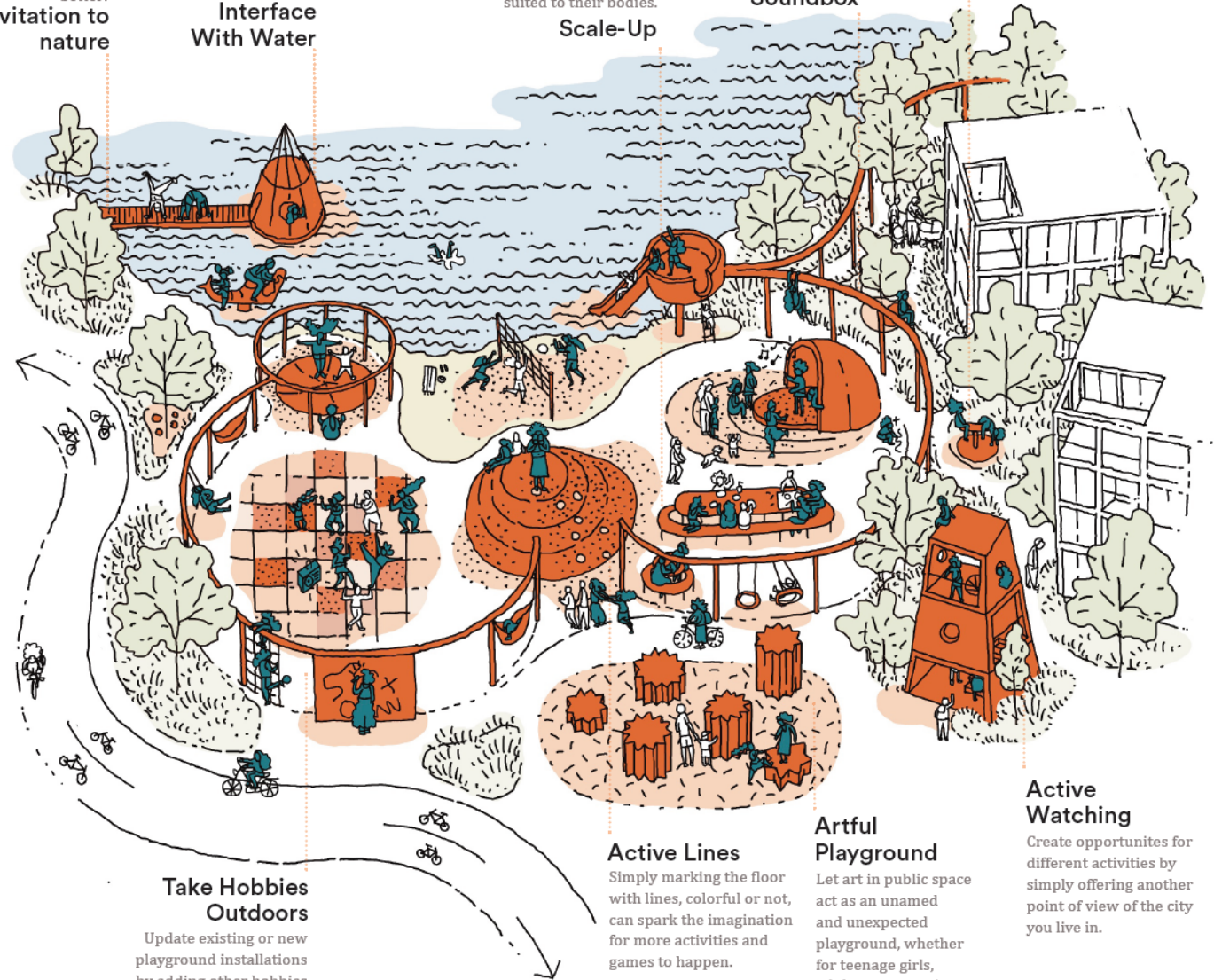
Take Hobbies Outdoors

Update existing or new playground installations by adding other hobbies that are often missing, like painting, dancing, boxing, and more.

Active Lines

Simply marking the floor with lines, colorful or not, can spark the imagination for more activities and games to happen.

Artful Playground

Let art in public space act as an unamed and unexpected playground, whether for teenage girls, adults or anyone!

Active Watching

Create opportunites for different activities by simply offering another point of view of the city you live in.

"I wanted to participate in the project because sometimes you hear that a new place has just opened, but when you see it, AND IT SUCKS. It's a shame."

GRAZIE PER L'ATTENZIONE!